



Park Facility Management Division

FHWA Ferry Boat Program - Next Steps

Many of the ferry systems serving park units received allocations from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Ferry Boat Program (FBP) in FY13 and FY14, but it is unclear if the National Park Service (NPS) is taking full advantage of this funding source. The Volpe Center recommends the following next steps to ensure that NPS is well-positioned to make the most of FBP.

Ensure all applicable NPS and concession ferry services are included in the most recent National Census of Ferry Operators (NCFO).

It appears that all publically-operated ferries serving NPS units were allocated FY13 & FY14 FBP funds. However, not all concession ferry operations received funding through the program. We recommend working quickly to ensure that all concession ferry operations are on the most recent NCFO. This would presumably make qualifying concession operations eligible for funding in future years. The NCFO is a biennial census, and the 2014 census is currently underway. The contact information for the NCFO is (800) 853-1351 (phone) or ferry@dot.gov (email).

Investigate ferry operations which serve areas near NPS units to determine which ones have a public component.

There are many privately-operated ferries which serve areas nearby NPS units, some of which have a significant impact on visitation. Several of these systems did not receive FBP funding in FY13 and FY14. An example of this is the ferry operation serving the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area (BOHA): Boston Harbor Cruises, which is not a concession operation, provides critical transportation services from Boston BOHA. Boston Harbor Cruises did not receive FBP funding in FY13 or FY14. Without Boston Harbor Cruises, visitor accessibility to the islands would be significantly limited, which would likely considerably reduce visitation.

Volpe recommends examining the private ferry services serving areas nearby park units to determine if they may be eligible under the FBP, including determining if the ferry services have any public component (such as use of a publicly-owned dock). For those services which are eligible but have not received funding in the past, Volpe recommends pursuing listing in the NCFO to ensure consideration in future years. In some cases, NPS may be able to work with the State and FHWA to investigate the availability of any carryover funding from FY14 (if applicable).

Analyze park unit use of previous FBP funding.

FHWA records clearly show FBP apportionments to NPS ferry operations in FY13 and FY14, but they do not provide details on whether or not those apportionments were used, or if they were redistributed to others. Volpe recommends analyzing how the FY13 and FY14 FBP funding was obligated by park units, and how much of the funding went unobligated. For those park units which

went through the process to develop projects and obligate funding, we recommend gathering information from park unit and regional transportation coordinator staff about the number of hours spent and the general level of effort required to access apportioned FBP funding. This information can be used to determine a breakeven level, above which park units are likely to see a return on investment of time and resources. In cases where apportioned funds are likely to be small, this will help NPS determine where best to allocate technical assistance resources.

Develop projects to take full advantage of FBP in future years.

Given the current uncertainty of Federal transportation funding, it is not clear how much funding will be available for FBP in FY15, or if changes will be made to the program from prior years. Given this uncertainty, the prudent course of action is to proceed with the development of projects which could be funded under current program guidance, and which would reasonably be able to be funded if past appropriations were continued at a similar level.

Volpe recommends that the Alternative Transportation Program (ATP) work with park units now, to develop appropriate FBP projects for the park units likely to receive funding. In some cases, park units may already have projects queued-up in anticipation of a continued funding. However, in case where park units are not yet prepared, ATP can provide technical assistance to develop potential ferry and terminal improvements at the park units, and assistance working with State DOTs to develop the project proposals in anticipation of FY15 FBP funding.